

A CRITICAL LOOK AT MODERN LEADERSHIP

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For decades individuals, groups, and organizations in Black spaces have found themselves discussing the critical issues impacting their lives. Leadership within the Black community never fails to find its way onto the list. Conversations around the topic describe what some call a lack thereof and others the “failures” of those who claim or were considered “leaders.” What is rarely discussed in the Black Community is how the desire for change is the people's will and yet only viewed as the leader's responsibility. Shifting our understanding of leadership as a position to leadership as a practice that each of us has the right and ability to do changes how individuals see themselves in the fight for change. The power to enact change is something that we all have access to, and by shifting our understanding of the responsibility, we give ourselves permission to learn and practice those skills that create the reality we wish to see.

From Dr. King organizing with local leaders through gaining buy-in and amplifying issues on local stages that became national issues, leadership in the Black Community has always moved in concert. At times not seemingly, Black Leaders have typically presented a defined unity. Even when at odds, our work lines up. From Gus Young to Joe Delpit, here locally has been no different. Black Baton Rouge leadership was once anchored by a strong/sizable middle class, which has been replaced in recent years with strong advocates and political leadership. Although seemingly ineffective at times, the success and gains

around issues that affect people that look like you and I couldn't have been accomplished without some form of strong black leadership—centered around a unifying point that doesn't always happen in rooms. It's almost atmospheric, it's there and understood.

Becoming a leader in name, but not by practice has become easier in recent years. With the rise of the internet and by consequence social media anyone can create a platform for themselves, and they have. However, many of them have not begun to master the skill of moving people from following online to becoming mobilized citizens in their communities offline. However, individuals alone do not carry the burden of Black leadership challenges in the community. Previous experiences have caused us to be protective of our communities, and as a result less trusting. If members of the community do not recognize you, they will not support you and this weakens an individual's ability to practice leadership which can and has led to a stalemate in some instances.

Today we see leaders who have many great self-accomplishments that often don't relate to the thought of collective success. We have too many revolutionaries with government contracts. If you step in a room and you're the only person that wins, that's more of consulting than leadership. With that said, success and progress can be seen in some areas. From body cams to entrepreneurship, gains can be seen.

For the Black community to begin to solve the leadership challenge there needs to be a fundamental shift in the way that we approach leadership. Leadership is not something you get when you have a title. The power and platform needed to practice leadership can be created by anyone. Every person in the Black community can exercise their power, share their experience and learn to practice leadership for the betterment of themselves and their communities. We must make a conscious effort to teach existing and emerging leaders to tools that will support them in their practice including the art and science of mobilization. There is a part of our history where we knew that strength in numbers was real. There is no leader if there aren't followers, supporters, and mobilized people working towards the goal.

About the Authors

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Eugene Collins is the current president of the Baton Rouge branch of the NAACP.



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Tamiera (TC) Nash is the Communications Catalyst at MetroMorphosis and works in partnership with team members to fundamentally shift the deficit-based narrative around Black and other POC's communities. Nash's work at MetroMorphosis is directly tied to influencing, creating, and supporting narrative change in the communities that the organization serves. Outside of their work, Nash is a community advocate and organizer who works with local non-profits to coordinate engagements to learn from those with lived experience. Previously, she sat on the Foundation for Louisiana's Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Advisory Board and the Baton Rouge Gun Violence Prevention Steering Committee. Currently, Nash is the owner of Twenty-Four Nineteen, LLC, a consulting agency focusing on branding and marketing for change making people, organizations and businesses. She also co-owns Mix-Her the Brand, LLC which is a small business dedicated to the celebration of Black women of all orientations and presentations including trans and masc. presenting. Nash obtained their Masters of Public Administration from THE Southern University A&M College and a Bachelor's of Arts from Spring Hill College.

